



Let's Connect Consultation

A workshop event for people who are Deaf from birth, deafened in later life and hard of hearing.

Spark Somerset have been trying to speak to people in different communities and find out three things:

- what mental health support is available where they live.
- how easy or difficult it is to speak to anyone.
- what is needed to make things better.

Spark arranged a day where people who are Deaf and use BSL and people who have lost their hearing during their lives could tell us about their experiences. There were two BSL interpreters to help so that people who use BSL could tell us in their own language.

The day began with a presentation. Lara Christiano talked about Open Mental Health Services in Somerset. Later in the day the folks from Rusty Road 2 Recovery spoke about the support that they offer in their garage and workshops. In between everyone took part in conversations about mental health services. There were also conversations about other important services in the community, GP surgeries, local government, citizens advice, and how difficult it can be to get help from them.

The message was clear.

Mental health support is available but is difficult to access.

The hearing community does not know enough about how to work with people from the Deaf and hard of hearing communities. People who work for service providers can be unhelpful and unkind. Sometimes they do not respect someone just because they cannot hear.

Things that should be easy, like making an appointment, become difficult because a Deaf person can not use a phone and there is no other way to do it. Even if someone does manage to make an appointment, if a BSL interpreter is not there then the appointment might be cancelled. When someone is already ill, or struggling with their mental health this can only make things worse.

Clearly, there need to be some changes:

- People who provide services to anyone who is Deaf or deaf need to be more aware of the barriers that their clients and patients face.
- It needs to be easier for everyone from the Deaf and hard of hearing communities to
 - get help,
 - make appointments and
 - communicate their needs.
- People who provide services should ask people who are Deaf and deafened to help them to make better choices about service delivery.
- People from the Deaf and hard of hearing communities should have the chance to become trained representatives so that service providers can work with them to improve and monitor their services.



What are the next steps?

Meetings will be arranged with Bridgwater and Taunton Deaf Club and Deafinite Matters CIC.

There is a Deafinite Connections Café in Bridgwater on the second Wednesday of the month. People can get advice, share experiences and get support to break down communication barriers.

Open Mental Health Somerset wants to recruit Experts by Experience to represent everyone from the Deaf and hard of hearing communities.

If you would like to get involved:

- You could volunteer to become an advocate with the South West Advocacy Network.
- You could volunteer to become an Open Mental Health Champion. A champion finds out about mental health support where they live and tell their family and friends. They can also have a say about how services should work.

To find out more, please get in touch:

Helen.fielden@sparksomerset.org.uk

Text or WhatsApp: 07535 800944

